

Rear Adm. John B. Heffernan
Director of Naval History
Washington 25, D.C.

15 August 1956

114

Review of Volume X -- "The Atlantic Battle Won"

I am returning herewith subject volume and my comments
on its review as requested by your memorandum of 9 July 1956.

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Enclosures:

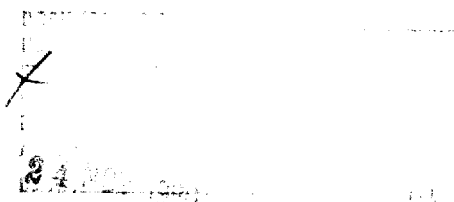
1. Subject Vol. X 25X1A9a [REDACTED]
2. Comments by [REDACTED]
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Rear Adm. John B. Heffernan
Director of Naval History
Office of the Chief of Naval Operations
Department of the Navy
Room 1210 Main Navy Bldg
Washington 25, D.C.

(Code 131-Ext. 64443)



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COMMENTS ON VOLUME X

The Atlantic Battle Won

By Captain K. A. Knowles, USN (Ret)

General: Professor Morrison has done a first rate job of pulling together a most heterogeneous as well as complex series of operations and incidents which comprised the Battle of the Atlantic. It is regrettable this whole period of U. S. operations could not have appeared in a single volume, since the Introduction to Volume X doesn't adequately tie in the period before April 1943.

A more serious criticism is the rather hasty conclusions evident throughout this volume, which appear to have been reached near the closing phases of the War and which should have been revised from the vantage point of ten years' objective appraisal. This criticism is perhaps too harsh in view of the author's tremendous task, yet I would hope an official naval history could be written to reflect more professional views on many serious points at issue.

To be specific on one major point: Volume X leaves me with the impression that submarine warfare is doomed to inevitable defeat by adequate surface and air craft. Had not God's finger been on us in World War II, a slight shift of the balance might well have seen the U-Boat campaign far more successful, if not victorious. Against that background the great advances in submarine development and weapon systems which have occurred since then raise serious professional questions whose answers, I'm confident, will not jibe with the author's conclusions. Yet this is the volume which the public and the Navy will be reading and from which lasting impressions will be formed. The Navy certainly cannot rest its case on the shoulders of a distinguished historian turned naval strategist.

- Page 8. Third paragraph: My own observations gave no indication that the British were beginning to lose confidence in our ability to get on top of the coastal problem, since the British could well recall their own similar difficulties during 1939-41, and did appreciate fully what we were going through.
- Page 9. Third paragraph: While the Germans were building U-Boats faster than the Allies were sinking them, the significant fact was the loss of experienced U-Boat captains and crews, who were not replaceable, and from which loss stemmed a consistent lowering of U-Boat operational effectiveness.
- Page 24. First paragraph: The Atlantic Section of COMINCH Combat Intelligence was the focal point of all U-Boat intelligence, not merely the HF/DF net. Direct communications were maintained with the Admiralty U-Boat Intelligence Center, and later with Canadian Combat Intelligence Headquarters in Ottawa. In addition, direct communications were maintained with CINCLANT and the Commanders of all Sea Frontiers. Because Naval Intelligence must operate behind closed doors, much of its story remains unknown. The unfortunate result is that the Navy as a whole loses sight of the vital contribution which intelligence made to the Allied victory in the Battle of the Atlantic. None of this, however, is apparent from Morison's account.
- Page 52. Fourth paragraph: The German's failure to diagnose the ASV (16-centimeter) was a major factor in the rapid decline of U-Boat effectiveness. The U-Boat high command spent fruitless months in trying to find out how aircraft could locate U-Boats and tried a whole series of tactics, including silencing their radar search receivers (believing the aircraft were picking up a feed-back signal), mounting heavier AA and fighting it out on the surface.
- Page 58. Morison underrates Doenitz. He was a superb commander who maintained the morale of the U-Boat service in spite of most severe losses. His tactical control of the wolf packs was not necessarily a "blunder." One must recall that the U-Boats were literally searching blind, without any really effective air reconnaissance. Centralized control and frequent reporting were, therefore, a rapid means of putting the maximum number of U-Boats on a convoy. There were defects in this system, which Morison has brought out, but there were also distinct advantages.

The integral tonnage concept was not unsound when viewed in the light of the circumstances. U-Boats had of necessity to seek out targets of opportunity just as U.S. subs first did in the Pacific. The difference in eventual strategy was the difference between our situation in the Pacific with its full air and naval support and the German situation in the Atlantic, in which this support was nonexistent.

Page 62, Second paragraph: The snorkel development was very successful and again enabled the U-Boats to operate close inshore, particularly around the British Isles from whence they had been driven with the advent of radar-equipped aircraft. The Type XXI was inherently a sound advance in U-Boat development and could have been a grave threat had this U-Boat come out earlier in the war, with its high underwater speed to outdistance all except the fastest escorts. The Walther-type would have put the U-Boat back in the forefront of the war. It had many of the characteristics that have only now been attained with the A-powered Nautilus.

Page 63, Doenitz naturally wanted as large tonnage sunk as possible--so did ComSublanc. It was the tangible gauge of U-Boat effectiveness and a truly needed prop to maintain the morale of the U-Boat service. Moreover, Doenitz was under constant pressure from Hitler to produce results and, in turn, used them as argument to launch the new U-Boat construction program of 1943-45 in the face of other heavy wartime commitments.

Page 129, First paragraph: This is not to detract from Admiral Ingersoll's efficient command, but the fact is that Com Tenth Fleet ordered these operations on the recommendation of COMINCH Combat Intelligence.

Page 244, Third paragraph: These conclusions deserve a more thorough analysis. Morison greatly oversimplifies the situation and leaves an erroneous impression regarding the significance of the U-Boat campaign.

Page 247, First paragraph: The statement commanding officers of U-Boats now average 21 years of age seems unlikely, although the Germans were certainly scraping the bottom of the barrel for U-Boat crews.

Page 293, Third paragraph: I believe U-505 capture was unknown to Doenitz until after the war.